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ABSTRACT

In an emergency response to the recent spree of school shootings, a group of experts came together to draft a national action plan on school violence and children. Participants included: almost 60 members of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Leadership; several mayors from communities which had recently experienced school shootings; police chiefs; elected representatives from the National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, and the National Parent/Teacher Asscciation; students; top health, parks and recreation, and arts officials; representatives from the entertainment industry and news media; and other national experts on youth violence. In addition to the recent shootings, the summit highlighted alarming statistics regarding youth violence in American cities. This report presents statistics on the following: school violence; what children do from 2:00 to 8:00 pm; youth violence and the news media; and youth violence and the entertainment industry. It offers suggestions for improvement in each of the four areas. (SM)

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THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

A NATIONAL PLAN

ED 439 181

SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND KIDS

from 2:00 to 8:00 pm

Proposals Adopted at
The National Summit
Salt Lake City
September 24, 1998

by

Mayors, Police Chiefs, Educators, Students, Arts, Parks and Recreation Officials, Health Experts, and Representatives from the News Media and Entertainment Industry

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Statement by
Deedee Corradini
Mayor of Salt Lake City
President
The U.S. Conference
of Mayors

On September 24, 1998 the nation's mayors sponsored an historic **National Summit on School Violence and Kids from 2:00 to 8:00 pm** in Salt Lake City. In an emergency response to the recent spree of school shootings, an unparalleled group of concerned leaders came together for the first time to draft a National Action Plan. Participants included almost 60 members of The U.S. Conference of Mayors Leadership, several mayors from communities which have recently experienced devastating school shootings, over 15 police chiefs, elected representatives from the National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, and the National Parent/Teachers Association, students, top health, parks, recreation and arts officials, representatives from the entertainment industry and news media, and other national experts on youth violence.

Attorney General Janet Reno recognized the importance of this National Summit and came to Salt Lake City to hear from the mayors and other national leaders, and to participate in the drafting of the National Action Plan.

In addition to the recent school shootings, the National Summit highlighted alarming statistics regarding youth violence in America's cities—in our schools, in our neighborhoods and in our families:

- A survey of 16,000 students found that four percent had skipped school in the past 30 days because they were afraid for their own safety.
- An estimated one million children between the grades of 6 and 12 carried guns to school at some point in the last school year.
- The rate of firearm deaths among children under 13 is nearly 12 times higher in the U.S. than in 25 other industrialized nations combined.
- Almost 30 percent of all juvenile offenses are committed on school days, between the hours of 2:00 and 8:00 pm.
- Children watch an average of 28 hours of television each week, roughly twice the time they spend in school.
- Before age 18, the average child will have witnessed over 200,000 violent acts on television, including 16,000 murders.
- More than 60 percent of television programming contains violence.
- 76 percent of children's programming portrays violence in a humorous context.

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Prior to the National Summit, a call went out to all mayors requesting best practices on preventing school violence. The response was immediate and overwhelming. After meeting with local police and community leaders, over 125 mayors submitted in excess of 220 best practices. The resulting report, entitled *Preventing School Violence: Best Practices of Mayors in Collaboration with the Police, Schools, and the Community*, was developed with support from the COPS Office at the U.S. Department of Justice and released at the National Summit by the Conference of Mayors Best Practices Center.

During the Salt Lake City meeting, participants worked to develop our *National Action Plan on School Violence and Kids from 2:00 to 8:00 pm* which covers four critical areas: **School Violence; Kids from 2:00 to 8:00 pm; Youth Violence and the News Media; and Youth Violence and the Entertainment Industry**. The National Action Plan includes a call for:

- 100,000 new school counselors, modeled on the successful COPS program — a suggestion which was strongly supported by Attorney General Reno;
- The formation of joint task forces of mayors with both entertainment industry and news media executives to address the proliferation of violence presented to our children;
- A boycott against products whose commercials fund violent TV programs;
- A comprehensive effort to reduce youth-related gun violence, including "one gun a month" limitations, personalization of guns, and increased gun-owner responsibility;
- School uniforms as an effective means of promoting discipline and safer schools;
- School systems to keep school facilities open before school, after school and on weekends to offer meaningful and safe programs for youth;
- Increased after-school, summer job and school-to-career opportunities for youth;
- Alternative schools for dropouts and others not able to learn in a typical school setting;
- An all-out effort to reduce school truancy and provide a safe environment in schools;
- Greater involvement of arts, music, parks and recreation officials in delivering youth services; and
- Arts, music, physical fitness and sports programs as part of the school curriculum for all students.

On October 15, it was my honor to present this National Action Plan and the Best Practices report to President Clinton, Vice President Gore, Mrs. Clinton and a variety of distinguished participants in the White House Conference on School Safety. The National Action Plan was extremely well received by the President, who commended its comprehensive approach and credited the mayors' call for increased school counselors and the need to put arts, music, physical fitness and sports programs back in schools as a part of the curricula. The President also praised the Best Practices report as an important resource for mayors and others to learn what is already working in cities across the nation.

Following the White House Conference, participants in our National Summit in Salt Lake City were provided with an additional opportunity to refine the document, and it is my pleasure to present our final *National Action Plan on School Violence and Kids from 2:00 to 8:00 pm.*

Our objective now is to actively pursue the implementation of the proposals contained in the document. Many of the action items can be implemented by mayors working within their own cities, but others require a partnership with the states, the federal government, the private sector and non-profit entities. The nation's mayors are committed to the work before us, and look to you for your assistance in moving this critical national agenda forward.

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SCHOOL VIOLENCE

A nationwide survey found that 7.4 percent of all students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property one or more times during a 12 month period. Another study recently found that one in twenty high school students carried a gun in a one month period. In addition, 59 percent of children surveyed in another study said that they could get a gun if they wanted, and 35 percent said it would take less than one hour to acquire the firearm.

- **Key indicators of youth violence must be recognized** including: 1) substance abuse; 2) failure in school/truancy; 3) anti-social behavior; 4) negative peer associations; 5) environmental indicators such as access to weapons, concentrated poverty, and lack of safe supervised areas for play; and 6) dysfunctional families.

- **100,000 school counselors are needed,** modeled on the successful COPS program.

- **School uniforms** should be worn by all students to promote discipline and help equalize students from all socio-economic backgrounds, in order to enhance learning and make schools safer.

- **Later starting times** at schools are needed in light of the latest studies on children's learning patterns, and class days should be extended to help reduce after-school youth crime and violence, promote academic achievement and assure healthy development.

- **School campuses should be closed** and lunch required on school premises to reduce crime and violence during school hours.

- **A comprehensive effort to reduce youth-related gun violence** is needed including passage of "one gun a month" legislation, elimination of the federal gun show loophole to cut sales of weapons to youth, support for the personalization of guns, and a requirement that gun owners be held criminally liable for children who gain access to improperly stored guns.

- **Weapons/Crisis hotlines** should be available for students to report knowledge of other students carrying weapons, as well as students who make threats of violence or talk about suicide.

- **Metal detectors** help reduce school violence and should be made available to schools that need them.

- **Students who bring weapons to school** should be held for 72 hours for psychological evaluation. Mental fitness and low self-esteem in youth must be addressed. Troubled kids must receive early assessment, and courts, prosecutors and community groups need to be involved in this effort.

- **Police officers in and around schools** help reduce violence and provide role models. Police presence in schools should vary - DARE works best in elementary schools; police officers are more often needed in high schools. Police must be allowed to conduct random searches of lockers and backpacks as a preventive effort to reduce violence.

- **All violent criminal acts** on school property must be reported to the police immediately by school officials.

- **Violent juvenile felony offenders should be prosecuted as adults** so that they understand and are held accountable for the consequences of their actions.

- **Confidentiality must be eliminated for juveniles who commit violent felonies** so that their records can be transferred to the adult criminal justice system and made available to school systems.

- **Parental involvement** is essential for safe schools. Parents must be encouraged to volunteer in schools and employers must create family-friendly workplaces to allow for increased parental involvement. In addition, parenting skills training and other support must be provided where needed. Parents must also be held responsible for students who continually violate school rules. Child support orders must also be enforced.

- **Truancy laws** must be enforced and used as a mechanism to help identify problems faced by some young people. Parents should be contacted in the morning, not the evening, if a child is absent and be held responsible for truancy. Police and truancy officers should make house calls for kids continually absent from school, and can even wake up kids in the morning to help get them to school.

- **Domestic violence** must be addressed to interrupt the cycle of violence. Independent living options are needed for some 16 and 17 year-olds to get them out of abusive or dangerous home situations.

- **100,000 new teachers** are needed to reduce class size, which will lead to safer learning environments. In addition, school modernization (facilities, technology, recreational alternatives) must be implemented to ensure safe school environments.

- **Teachers must be trained** to be effective classroom managers, strict disciplinary codes in schools must be fairly enforced, community-based disciplinary oversight committees are needed, and lower level disciplinary problems must have early intervention.

- **Conflict resolution and anger management** must be taught in schools, utilizing programs that have proven to be effective, and beginning as early as kindergarten. School systems should explore the idea of instituting full-day kindergarten beginning no later than age five, in order to accommodate this expanded curriculum. Every teacher and police officer should have training in conflict resolution.

- **Alternative schools** must be available for dropouts, students who are suspended or expelled, and others not able to learn in a typical school setting. Community service must be required for kids who are disruptive in school. In addition, in-school facilities must be available for disruptive students.

- **Good kids** must also be given attention and provided rewards which encourage connectedness to the school and community. Discipline should focus on positive behaviors. Youth and cultural diversity forums should be held to hear from kids and generate new ideas for reducing school violence. Mentoring and positive role modeling programs are needed in the schools.

- **Assets models** should be utilized to identify the resources kids need to possess in order to grow and make good life decisions, and to help identify at-risk kids and develop strategies for them. At-risk neighborhood programs that allow residents to identify the need for prenatal care and make parents aware of other available services are showing impressive results and should be supported.

- **Zero drug and alcohol tolerance** must be enforced at every school. Critical substance abuse treatment and other support services should be provided to students found to be in need.

KIDS FROM 2:00 TO 8:00 PM

There are more than 28 million children in urban, suburban and rural areas whose parents work outside the home, primarily due to economic necessity. At least five million of these children are "latchkey kids" who come home to an empty house every day after school. Almost 30 percent of all juvenile offenses are committed on school days, between the hours of 2:00 and 8:00 pm.

- **Mayors, city councils and school boards must meet to work on the joint use of public facilities** for youth programs before school, after school and on weekends.

- **School systems must open school facilities for after-school programs** in such areas as continued learning, physical education, arts, music and recreation. Park service personnel, as well as community volunteers, can help run the programs if schools stay open. Solutions must be found to address funding and insurance issues that limit the use of schools.

- **Transportation to after-school programs** outside of the school system should be provided by school systems.

- **Before-school programs** are needed for the children of parents who must be at work, especially if school start times are to be made later in the morning.

- **Safe weekend and summertime programs** are needed, especially for latchkey kids.

- **Communities of faith and community-based organizations** should be encouraged to provide youth activity centers before school, after school and on weekends.

- **Volunteer involvement** is critical to the success of before-school, after-school and weekend programs. Cities should create volunteer campaigns that focus on recruiting, training and supporting volunteers who participate in youth programs.

- **Hungry children must be fed** in before- and after-school programs.

- **Youth services hotlines** are needed to provide parents and kids one-stop-shopping information on all services provided by agencies and community organizations in a city. Neighboring communities should cooperate, link and standardize services.

- **Parks, recreation, physical fitness and sports programs can play a powerful role in helping kids** stay out of trouble and must be supported. They help kids deal with self-esteem and anger management issues, and have been proven to reduce at-risk behaviors. Sports and physical fitness programs must be supported as part of the school curriculum for all students. After-school programming should maximize out-of-school learning time for children by offering a range of activities including academic enrichment and preparations, and homework time of at least one-half hour should be required in after-school recreation programs. More local parks are needed and some brownfields should be converted into parks.

- **Arts and music programs** must be supported because they increase learning skills, help reduce violence and truancy, and give kids a positive outlet for self-expression. More of these programs are needed in our nation's schools as part of the curriculum. Partnerships are also needed between local arts councils, cultural institutions and city agencies.

- **Community Schools** with in-house health clinics, social services agencies and police involvement can help prevent crime and offer a meaningful alternative to youth, and must be supported.

- **Junior ROTC for high school students** should be considered as an inexpensive resource which provides the opportunity for collaboration, and offers discipline, structure and recreation.

- **Every mayor should have a youth coordinator.** In addition, every city should have a youth development strategy and a coordinated system for delivering services to as well as listening to youth.

- **Curfews** reduce youth violence and crimes committed by youth and should be enforced. Curfew intake centers can be run out of park and community centers, with police involvement, because kids are less threatened by recreation officials. Youth car cruising must be eliminated.

- **Police must be involved in prevention, therefore the COPS program must be continued and expanded.** Police Athletic Leagues work, especially because younger officers hired through the COPS program want to interact with kids. Prevention needs to be incorporated into all police training. In addition, police officers should work with probation officers to monitor youth offenders.

- **Gang prevention** and early intervention strategies to prevent young students from becoming involved in gangs must be a top priority. Youth must be provided a safe means to report gang activity.

- **After-school, summer jobs and school-to-career** programs are needed, and creative employment opportunities must be found for younger kids who want jobs. On-the-job counseling and mentoring must also be provided to help young workers succeed in jobs. Mentors and counselors need training. Life skills such as getting to work on time, getting directions, and opening a bank account must be taught to children. Retired people can be of great assistance in the mentoring effort.

- **Technical assistance** is needed for many smaller companies and community organizations that want to offer quality after-school programs.

- **Hospitals** often have "healthy communities" initiatives which should be used to help kids after school. Such after-school programming provides an excellent opportunity to educate adolescents regarding healthy lifestyles/wellness and behaviors that put them at risk. Adolescent nutrition and fitness coordinators and hospital staff, via health community programs, can be integral to after-school programs.

YOUTH VIOLENCE AND THE NEWS MEDIA

A 1997 study, which analyzed tapes of local evening newscasts from 100 local stations in 35 states aired the same day, found that 30 percent of the news was devoted to violence and crime. Crime is down in America, but the coverage of crime is up. For example, a California study found that over one-half of television news coverage about youth concerned violence, and over two-thirds of violence stories involved youth, even though juveniles were responsible for less than 15 percent of the violent crime in the state during the same period.

- **Sensationalist coverage of violence** in local and national news must end.
- **A joint task force of mayors and news media executives** should work to ensure more accurate and balanced news coverage of youth-related issues.
- **Commercials and sponsorships** promoting products such as video games, toys, music, movies, and other television programs that implicitly or explicitly encourage violence should be rejected by news programs which air in the morning hours before school or the afternoon and early evening hours.
- **Mayors, police chiefs and school superintendents** should meet annually with local heads of media networks to discuss local news coverage. News editors must be called on unbalanced coverage. The power of viewer complaints cannot be understated, especially when they come from elected officials.
- **Mayors should help local news media put together positive youth stories.**
- **Schools must reach out to the media** in order to get more positive messages aired.
- **The news media should identify local youth heros** and show them weekly on TV.
- **More follow-through coverage of criminal justice cases** showing guilty verdicts and punishment is needed.
- **Teen pages** for kids to write articles about positive youth experiences should be provided by newspapers.
- **Gun advertising** which suggests that a gun in the home makes a family safer should be rejected by the media.

YOUTH VIOLENCE AND THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Studies have shown that eight-year-old boys who viewed the most violent programs were more likely to be rated by peers as very aggressive by the age of 19, and to have engaged in serious criminal behavior by the age of 30. Other studies have found that more than 60 percent of television programs contain violence, and that 76 percent of children's programs portray violence in a humorous context.

- **A joint task force of mayors and national entertainment industry executives** should work on reducing violence in entertainment industry products.
- **Parents must monitor and restrict children's entertainment choices** in TV, movies, music, video games and the Internet, and be provided technology which allows them to limit access to inappropriate content. TV should not be used as a babysitter.
- **Commercials for violent movies and TV programs** should not be aired during youth-watching hours.
- **A boycott** should be implemented against products whose commercials fund violent TV programs.
- **Programs with high levels of violence, including "reality" shows,** should be scheduled only during late-night hours.
- **Violent Saturday morning cartoons** must be eliminated.
- **Non-violent programming** is needed to discourage violence. When violence does occur, every effort must be made to show its negative consequences. A national clearinghouse on independently-produced positive programming should be established.
- **Mayors should utilize government access channels** as a resource to help produce and air positive shows.
- **Young people need media training** to help them understand and evaluate what they are viewing, and programs should be offered in schools.
- **A Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign** is needed against violence in the media and entertainment industry and should be aired by local and national television outlets.

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